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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GENEVA 002372

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PREF CO UNHRC

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH COLOMBIAN VICE PRESIDENT FRANCISCO SANTOS

Classified By: Political Counselor Velia De Pirro. For reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

Summary

1. (C) Colombia VP Santos shared September 23 with Ambassador Moley his concerns about the growing UN presence in Colombia and his hopes for drastic changes in the mandate of the OHCHR field office there. Santos stressed the need for cooperation but not interference from the UN agencies. He noted his intention to propose to High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour that OHCHR's field office in Colombia focus on capacity building with the goal of departing the country as soon as the government and local institutions can carry out the work on their own. Santos expressed support for general criteria for membership in the new Human Rights Council, but said Colombia could not support criteria that would exclude it from the Council or would permit NGO membership. End summary.

Santos to Propose Drastic Changes in OHCHR Colombia Mandate Proposed

2. (C) Vice President Santos, accompanied by Colombian UN Permanent Representative in Geneva Clemencia Forero, called on Ambassador Moley September 23. Santos was in Switzerland to meet with High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey, and EU Troika ambassadors. Santos, admitting this was just being worked out, said he planned to propose to Arbour dramatic changes in OHCHR's mandate for Colombia when it is re-negotiated before its October 2006 expiration. Santos complained that UN agencies in Colombia focused more on perpetuating their presence there than in Colombian institution building. Ambassador Forero charged that UN agencies in Colombia are fighting among themselves to secure funding for increased operations.

3. (C) Santos said the new mandate for OHCHR's field office in Colombia needs to center on cooperation, especially capacity building, with Colombia rather than intervention.⁸ Santos stressed that UN agencies should leave once their objectives are met or as soon as the host government/institutions are capable of carrying them out. He argued that OHCHR and other UN agencies highlight the negative in Colombia while disregarding progress, as a means of justifying their continued presence in the country. Santos said that he planned to brief Ambassador Wood and other missions in Bogota next week. He stressed that U.S. backing for the proposal was essential and asked for our support in discussions with Arbour. The Ambassador noted U.S. support for Colombian efforts in general. He noted that he had mentioned to High Commissioner Arbour the need to avoid penalizing nations that cooperate with OHCHR and to support their efforts to make improvements. The Ambassador encouraged Santos to speak frankly with High Commissioner Arbour about his concerns and plans.

Human Rights Council Concerns

4. (C) Turning to the upcoming discussions in New York on the creation of a Human Rights Council (HRC), Santos expressed concern over proposals he said had support from many EU and GRULAC members, including Mexico, to exclude countries with any human rights problems from membership. He feared that such a blanket exclusion would prevent nations such as Colombia, solid democracies facing problems, from membership. Santos noted that this proposal also included having OHCHR as a member of the Council as well as NGOs. He warned that if agreement is reached on these terms, Colombia would not support the Council. Santos endorsed the idea of basic, general criteria being established for inclusion in the Council) established democratic government, elections, protection of minorities or similar standards. The Ambassador noted that U.S. interests centered on a smaller, effective Council that excluded human rights violators such as Burma and Cuba.

Distrust of Swiss Foreign Minister Calmy-Rey

5. (C) Noting he was traveling later in the day to Bern

with Foreign Minister Calmy-Rey, Santos said he did not expect much to come from the meeting. Ambassador Forero noted Colombian concern with ties some of Calmy-Rey's advisors had with the FARC. She and Santos speculated that Calmy-Rey's interest in Colombia's peace process was probably due to her interest in finding a role for herself in this high profile issue.

Moley